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LUNDEN: We've been hearing a lot lately about the CIA's covert assistance to counterrevolutionaries who are trying to overthrow the Communist government in Nicaragua. John Stockwell is a former CIA agent who has firsthand knowledge of these kinds of covert operations. He once headed a task force that helped coordinate the CIA's secret activities in Angola during that country's civil war in the 1970s. Mr. Stockwell has just recently returned from a trip to Nicaragua and he is joining us this morning from station WXYZ in Detroit. Mr. Stockwell, good morning. STOCKWELL: Good morning.

LUNDEN: I think we all have in our imaginations what we think the CIA does. You are a former CIA operative. What can the CIA do? How does it work? STOCKWELL: Well, when the CIA goes into a country initially it's out to create an infrastructure of agents. That would mean recruiting people in the government, the local media and opposition parties, secret agents who can report information. When a country's targeted for a covert action then it's trying to activate opposition groups, to arm them, to do political action and in the case of a big covert action like in Nicaragua today, to destabilize the country, to make it fall apart by making the people simply so miserable throughout as much of the country as possible that the government can't govern.

LUNDEN: So in other words, what you're saying is if you look at Nicaragua a year ago there were maybe 5,000-6,000 counterrevolutionaries. Today there are, I believe, about 15,000. In other words, the CIA would be responsible for building that up and what would the counterrevolutionaries do if the CIA didn't back them, they weren't there? STOCKWELL: Yes, the CIA built up the contra force in Nicaragua from essentially zero in 1981 and the first goal was 500 and then 1,500 and then 5,000 and now 15,000. The force would fall apart in a matter of weeks if the CIA withdrew its money and they didn't get money and support from somewhere else.

LUNDEN: But is this something new? Is the Reagan administration using the CIA's covert activities in Central America or anywhere around the world any differently than previous administrations? STOCKWELL: It's more aggressive than anyone has been for about 15 years. The CIA, mind you, according to Sen. Church, when he investigated in 1975, he found that the CIA had found several hundred covert action, covert operations a year, and it's been 35 years. So you're talking about 10,000

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covert operations altogether. People die in these things. If you add them all up including the big one in Indonesia, you're talking about over a million victims, first-line, direct victims of these things. President Reagan simply has more of them going, more aggressively.

LUNDEN: Textbooks on government would tell you, of course, that the State Department sets up foreign policy for an administration. How much say does the CIA have in setting up foreign policy in Central America or anywhere in the world? STOCKWELL: My own analysis puts the CIA about 60 percent control of most of our foreign policy. It has the major input of information in briefing the president six times a day on different parts of the world, so it can bias him. For example, to be against the Sandinistas instead of to be for them. When you get into a major area of operation, of violent operation like Central America today, the CIA has 80 or 90 percent control. The State Department's out of it.

LUNDEN: What disturbed you the most when you visited Nicaragua recently? STOCKWELL: It was to see, once again, on the scene, destabilization has to be the most inhumane form of warfare ever devised, to make the people miserable, to make them suffer. Added to this one, and it's of course been going for years and people are dying, children are being maimed, but added to this one is the threat of imminent invasion by United States forces. So the people in the capital of Managua have to be prepared to go into the jungles to live and some of them to die, and it just makes me sick at heart to see the United States, my country, doing this once again.

LUNDEN: Now you say imminent invasion. What evidence do you have to back up that, that we're going to become involved in a civil war in Central America? STOCKWELL: There is every indicator that could possibly exist that the momentum of our government and the intentions of the Reagan administration are to commit U.S. troops in Central America. It started with Alexander Haig in 1981 openly proposing it. The administration balked because the people in this country were 89 percent against it. They polled 89 percent against it. Then we had Alexander Haig coming out recently in Time magazine with two articles in which he was castigating the Reagan administration for not following his advice in 1981, three years before the election, and putting U.S. troops in. The pressure is all there and right at this moment we have 350 ships, we have 30,000 troops and we have these little units, installations and airfields that are being built up throughout Honduras and El Salvador.

LUNDEN: All right. Mr. Stockwell, thank you very much for joining us this morning.